

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FOLLOWING RECD FROM CALCUTTA DATED MARCH 15, 1978 BEING RPTD
TO YOU.

QUOTE

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, IN
SUBJECT: THE RESERVATION ISSUE IN BIHAR

REF: CALCUTTA 425

1. THE SITUATION IN BIHAR IN THE WAKE OF THE EVENTS
DESCRIBED IN THE REFTEL IS CONFUSING, TO SAY THE LEAST,
AND, IN THE OPINION OF SOME, POTENTIALLY EXPLOSIVE.

2. AT PRESENT, UNCONNECTED WITH THE PRESENT RESERVATION
PROPOSAL, 24 PERCENT OF GOVERNMENTAL POSITIONS IN BIHAR ARE
RESERVED FOR SCHEDULED TRIBES AND CASTES. WHAT IS NOW AT
ISSUE IS AN EFFORT TO RESERVE A FURTHER 26 PERCENT OF
SUCH JOBS (WHICH WOULD INCLUDE, FOR EXAMPLE, TEACHING
POSITIONS) FOR WHAT ARE DESCRIBED AS "BACKWARD CLASSES".
THE ELECTION MANIFESTO OF THE JANATA PARTY HAD PROMISED
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SUCH A RESERVATION, TO RANGE BETWEEN 25 AND 33 PERCENT
OF THE JOBS, AND CHIEF MINISTER KARPORRI THAKUR CLAIMS
THAT HIS GOVERNMENT'S AGREEMENT ON THE 26 PERCENT FIGURE
IS IN PURSUANCE OF THIS PROMISE, AS HE STATED IN A PATNA
RADIO BROADCAST ON MARCH 12. HE CITED SIMILAR RESERVATIONS IN
TAMIL NADU (31 PERCENT), ANDHRA PRADESH (30 PERCENT)
AND KERALA (40 PERCENT) AND SAID THAT OTHER STATES

HAD DIFFERENT PERCENTAGES OF RESRVATIONS.

3. THE ISSUE IS OVER HOW TO DEFINE BACKWARD CLASSES. J.P. NARAYAN HAD PUBLICLY TAKEN THE STAND THAT THE CRITERIA SHOULD BE PURELY ECONOMIC, ALONG THE LINES OF THE FAMILIAR AMERICAN POVERTY LINE PRINCIPAL. THE AGITATION WHICH HAS STARTED IN BIHAR IS OVER THE STATE GOVERNMENT'S EXISTING DEFINITION OF THEM, WHICH IS BASED ON CASTE LINES. THEY INCLUDE WHAT MIGHT BE CALLED THE MIDDLE CLASTES, I.E., THOSE BETWEEN THE SCHEDULED CASTES AND TZKTYNTVCPUD.

4. SEVENTEEN JANATA MLAS HAVE SIGLDUH JOINT STATEMENT ACCUSING STATE JANATA LEADERS OF PROMOTING CASTEISM IN THE NAME OF SOCIALISM TO ACHIEVE PERSONAL GOALS. A THREAT HAS BEEN REGISTERED BY SOME 80 JANATA MLAS TO WITHDRAW THEIR SUPPORT FOR THE THAKUR GOVERNMENT (JANAT HOLDS 214 OF 324 SEATS IN THE ASSEMBLY). BY NO COINCIDENCE, THE NUMBER 80 ROUGHLY CORRESPONDS TO THOSE WHO SUPPORTED THE HIGH CASTE MP S.N. SINHA, WHO LOST OUT TO THAKUR IN THE CHIEF MINISTER RACE LAST YEAR. THERE IS ALSO REPORTED DISSENSION WITHIN THE CABINET, WITH THE OPPOSITION SAID TO BE LED BY FINANCE MINISTER (AND LONGTIME JAN SANGHI) KAILASHPATI MISHRA.

5. THE PROBLEM WITH THE CASTE DIFINITION IS THAT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THE "BACKWARD" CASTES AS DEFINED IN BIHAR, INCLUDING THE YADAVS AND OTHERS, TEND TO INCLUDE THE MAJOR LANDHOLDERS AND SOME OF THE MORE AFFLUENT, WHILE THE HIGHER CASTES INCLUDE MANY LANDLESS AND WHITE COLLAR AND PFOFESSIONAL WORKERS, THE SORT WHO WOULD, AND DO, TEND TO FILL THOSE GOVERNMENT POSITIONS FROM WHICH THE ADDITIONAL 26 PERCENT RESERVATION BASED ON CASTE RATHER THAN ECONOMIC STATUS WOULD EXCLUDE THEM.

6. J.P. NARAYAN IS APPARENTLY RATHER CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE. THOSE LEADING THE ROCKTHROWING ON THE MAIDAN LAST SUNDAY WERE THE BACKWARDS, WHO WERE AGAINST J.P. FOR HIS OFT-EXPRESSED POSITION FAVORING THE ECONOMIC TEST FOR BACKWARDSNESS. BUT THE RAMPAGING UPPER CASTES, MANY OF WHOM ARE STUDENTS, WHO FEEL THREATENED BY THE THAKUR CABINET DECISION, HAVE ACCUSED J.P. OF SELLING OUT ON HIS FORMER VIEWS, SIMPLY BECAUSE THAKUR IS CONSIDERED TO BE J.P.'S MAN. AS NARAYAN RATHER WRYLY COMMENTED ON SUNDAY, HE CAN GET INTO TROUBLE EVEN WHEN HE DOSN'T SAY ANYTHING OR TAKE A STAND.

7. THE GOVERNMENT HAS CLOSED THE UNIVERSITIES THROUGH

THE HOLI PERIOD (MARCH 24), AND HIS IMPOSED PROHIBITORY ORDERS UNDER SECTION 144 AGAINST PUBLIC GATHERINGS IN AN EFFORT TO RESTRAIN VIOLENCE FOLLOWING THE MAIDAN EPISODE OF MARCH 12. HOWEVER, THE ISSUE REMAINS AN EXPLOSIVE ONE AND COULD WELL BE EXPLOITED IN A FASHION LIKELY TO CAUSE MORE VIOLENCE, AT WORST, AND ACUTE EMBARRASSMENT TO THE THAKUR GOVERNMENT AT BEST. THE ISSUE SPLITS THE BIHAR JANATA GROUP, AND ALLOWS THE CONGRESS (I) NOW THE PRINCIPAL OPPOSITION UNDER FORMER CHIEF MINISTER JAGGANATH MISHRA, THE OPPORTUNITY TO FOMENT ALL SORTS OF TROUBLE BEHIND THE SCENES WHILE PUBLICLY BLAMING THE THAKUR GOVERNMENT FOR WHATEVER BREAKDOWN IN LAW AND ORDER THE CONGRESS GROUP MAY BE ABLE TO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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HELP STIMULATE. FINALLY, IT HAS BEEN LEARNED THAT INDIRA GANDHI PLANS A VISIT TO PANTA ON APRIL 9 FOR A BIHAR CONGRESS POLITICAL AND WORKERS MEETING. IT MAY BE DIFFICULT FOR THE THAKUR GOVERNMENT TO DEFUSE THE JOB RESERVATION ISSUE BEFORE THEN. PERHAPS THERE ARE SOME PARALLELS IN UTTA PRADESH. PERKINS UNQUOTE
GOHEEN

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